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YOUNG FOLKS' PROGRAM

Fri., Dec. 23, 1937.

SUBJECT: Christ as Trees.

ANNOUNCEMENT: Where's Jim and Uncle Abe? They must be busy gettin' ready for Christmas. The last time I saw them they were looking for ornaments for the Christmas tree.--- Ah, here they come now---- Yes, that's Uncle Abe of the Department of Agriculture. The boy with him is his nephew, Jim. Let's see what they're up to.

JIM: Who started Christmas trees anyway, Uncle Abe?

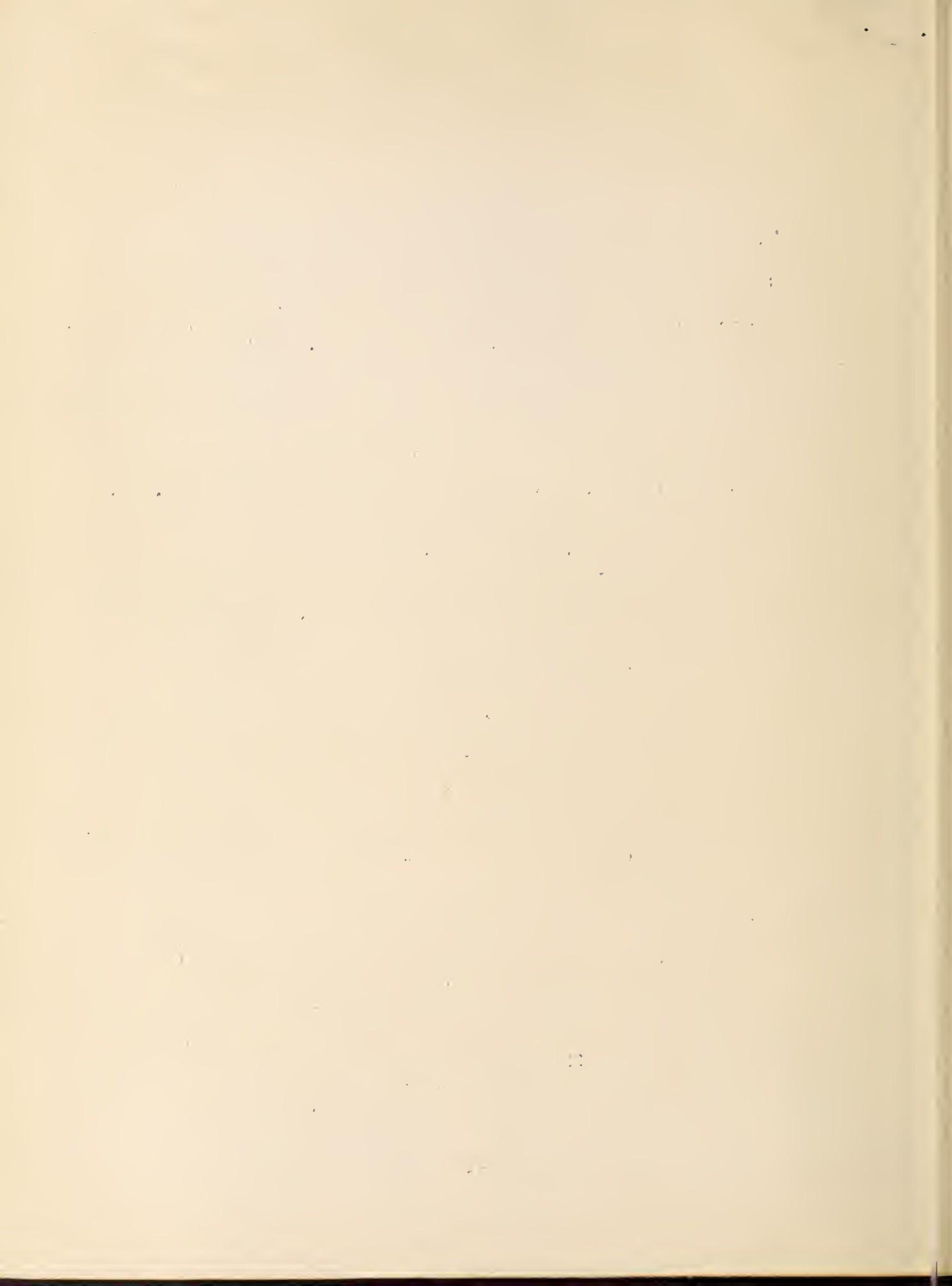
UNCLE ABE: I don't know, Jim. Christmas trees go a long way back. Just where the custom came from, I don't know that anybody knows. Some say one thin, some another. The ancient Egyptians used to decorate their houses about this time of the year with date palms. The date palm was a symbol of life triumphant over death. The Romans celebrated their feast of Saturn in midwinter. At that feast, they raised aloft an evergreen as a sign of joy. Some folks think the people the Romans conquered got the custom from the Romans. Others think the Christmas tree idea originated in Northern Europe, among the Scandinavians.

JIM: Did they have lights on the Christmas trees way back there?

UNCLE ABE: Well, among the Greeks, Christmas is still known as the Feast of Lights. Lights were also a feature of the Jewish Feast of Lights. There is one story that the first Christmas tree sprang from soil that had been drenched by the blood of two lovers who were murdered. During the Christmas season, the story goes, flaming lights sprang mysteriously from its branches at night. Just where the practice of lighting up the Christmas tree really started it is hard to say. Whatever its origin, the Christmas tree has come down to us as a beautiful sign of happiness and family ties. An old Anglo-Saxon story credits Saint Boniface with originating the Christmas tree.

JIM: Tell me the story, will you Uncle Abe?

UNCLE ABE: Well, you know, Winfrid or Saint Boniface, as he is generally known, was a missionary who converted some of the tribes of northern Europe to Christianity. Those people had been led to worship trees, so when they were converted Saint Boniface led them to a giant oak tree they had worshiped and cut it down. While he was cutting on it, a whirling wind passed over the forest and completed the job. The tree fell backward like a tower and split into four pieces as it fell. Just behind it, unharmed by the fallen oak, the people saw a young fir tree standin' pointin' its green spire toward the sky. Saint Boniface dropped



his ax. Turning to his people he said:

"This little tree, the young child of the forest, shall be your holy tree tonight. It is the wood of peace, for your houses are built of its fir. It is a sign of endless life, for its leaves are evergreen. See how it points upward to heaven. Let this be called the tree of the Christ-child. Gather around it. It will shelter no deeds of blood, but loving gifts and rites of kindness."

JIM: We use fir trees even now for Christ as trees, don't we, Uncle Abe?

UNCLE ABE: Yes. The fir tree is a favorite Christmas tree in nearly all parts of this country. In the Northeastern and Lake States it is balsam fir that is prized. The balsam not only makes a beautiful ornament in the home, but it brings the fragrance of the woods with it. Now, in the South, the southern balsam fir, or just balsam, figures as a Christmas tree. But the trouble is, you don't find it anywhere except on the tops of mountains throughout North Carolina and Tennessee. For that reason, other evergreen trees are used oftener. In Colorado and other Rocky Mountain States, white fir and Douglas fir are mostly used for Christmas. Where they are hard to get, lodgepole pine and Englemann spruce are mostly used. On the Pacific Coast, also, the trees most sought for Christmas are the Douglas fir and the white fir.

JIM: What other trees are used?

UNCLE ABE: The spruces are almost as popular as the firs. As a rule, in the South and West, however, they grow so high up and are so hard to get, that the folks depend more on other evergreens. Black and red spruce are commonly seen in New England cities, and in New York and Philadelphia. In Illinois and Ohio, nurserymen supply part of the local demand with nursery-grown Norway spruce.

JIM: Pine trees are used, too, aren't they?

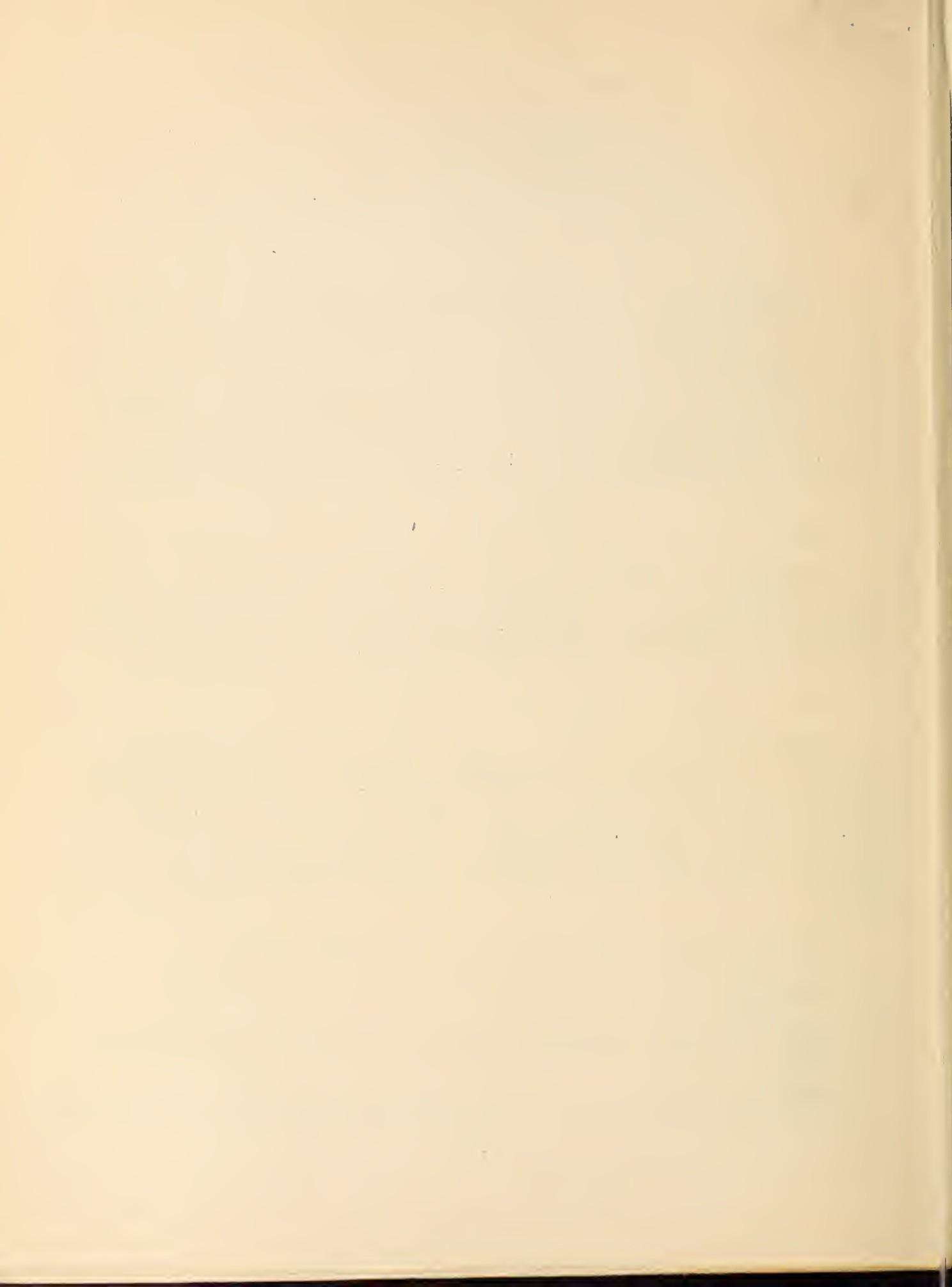
UNCLE ABE: Oh, yes. They are in great demand for Christmas trees when folks can't get fir and spruce cheap enough. Throughout Maryland and Virginia, and the District of Columbia, the Virginia pine finds its way into many homes. In southern Wyoming, the lodepole pine is almost the only species available for Christmas trees. In the South, too, the foxtail top of a longleaf pine sapling is a favorite tree. In the treeless States when nothing better can be had, even red cedar is used. Red cedar is also used in Tennessee and Pennsylvania. In California, it is not uncommon to find incense cedar and redwood used as Christmas trees.

JIM: It must take a lot of trees -- for the whole country.

UNCLE ABE: Yes, the United States uses between 5 and 6 million Christmas trees every year.

JIM: Whew! That sounds like a whole lot to just use a few days and then throw away.

UNCLE ABE: Well, we could grow all those trees on about 6,000 acres of land.



R.Y.F. 12/23/27

The amount of wood used up in Christmas trees is small compared with the loss from forest fires every year. Every year, fires sweep over millions of acres. They cause a waste of many millions of dollars worth of trees. No, Jim, it is not the number of trees used for Christmas, but the way we get them that counts.

JIM: How you mean?

UNCLE ABE: Well, this thing of stealin' trees from roadsides or forest land is outragous! Thinin' what belongs to somebody else is bad enough, but stealin' small evergreens not only interferes with the property rights of the owner, but it works against reforestation. Small trees should n't be cut indiscriminately from reforestin' land. On the other hand, a heavy thicket of young trees may benefit greatly by cuttin' out a number of them. That will give the others more light and space to grow. The question of cutting, however, is for the owner of the land to decide and not for the passing motorist who considers that one tree or less will do no harm. Many of the Christmas trees found in our eastern markets are grown especially for that purpose. Under such circumstances the cuttin' of Christmas trees is not contrary to forest conservation.

JIM: What is "conservation", Uncle Abe?

UNCLE ABE: Conservation really means wise use. What better use could a tree be put to than to be used as a Christmas tree? But, Jim, how would you like a living tree for your Christmas tree?

JIM: What do you mean?

UNCLE ABE: Why, a tree that is not cut, but dug, roots and all. We can buy one from a nurseryman.

JIM: What's the idea in that?

UNCLE ABE: Well, you could plant it in a big flower pot or a tub, according to the size of the tree, and keep it in the house until after Christmas, -- then--

JIM: Then what?

UNCLE ABE: Then you could carefully plant your Christmas tree in the lawn or garden. In a few years, you could have a starlike succession of Christmas trees which be a living and beautiful reminder of past Merry Christmases.

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